

Compare 20 Religions and Cults with Biblical Christianity

Christianity

Cults & Religions

7th Edition

**Side-by-side
comparison chart
of 20 groups**

Jehovah's Witnesses
Mormonism
Unification Church
Christian Science
New Age
Wicca
Scientology
Islam
Bahá'í
Kabbalah Centre
Hinduism
Hare Krishna
Buddhism
and more...

Founder, date, location
Who is God?
Who is Jesus?
How to be saved
What happens after death?
Key writings
Other beliefs and practices

ROSE
PUBLISHING

Biblical Christianity

**Key Person or Founder,
Date, Location**

Jesus Christ. Founded about AD 30–33, in the Judean province of Palestine (Israel today), under the Roman Empire. Followers of Jesus Christ became known as Christians.



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Key Writings

The Bible, written originally in Hebrew and Aramaic (Old Testament), and Greek (New Testament).

Who is God?

The one God is Triune (one God in three persons, not three gods): Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Often the title “God” designates the first person, God the Father. God is a spiritual being without a physical body. He is personal and involved with people. He created the universe out of nothing. He is eternal, changeless, holy, loving, and perfect.

Who is Jesus?

Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity. As God the Son, he has always existed and was never created. He is fully God and fully man (the two natures joined, not mixed). As the second person of the Trinity, he is coequal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. In becoming man, he was begotten through the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus is the only way to the Father, salvation, and eternal life. He died on a cross according to God’s plan, as the full sacrifice and payment for our sins. He rose from the dead on the third day, spiritually and physically immortal. For the next 40 days he was seen by more than 500 eye-witnesses. His wounds were touched and he ate meals. He physically ascended to heaven. Jesus will come again visibly and physically at the end of the world to establish God’s kingdom and judge the world.

**Who is the
Holy Spirit?**

The Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force or energy field. He comforts, grieves, reproves, convicts, guides, teaches, and fills Christians. He is not the Father, nor is he the Son, Jesus Christ.

How to be Saved

Salvation is by God’s grace, not by an individual’s good works. Salvation must be received by faith. People must believe in their hearts that Jesus died for their sins and physically rose again, which is the assurance of forgiveness and resurrection of the body. This is God’s loving plan to forgive sinful people.

**What Happens
after Death?**

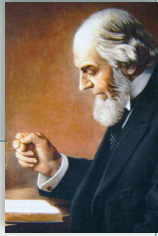
Believers go to be with Jesus. After death, all people await the final judgment. Both saved and lost people will be resurrected. Those who are saved will live with Jesus in heaven. Those who are lost will suffer the torment of eternal separation from God (hell). Jesus’ bodily resurrection guarantees believers that they, too, will be resurrected and receive new immortal bodies.

**Other Facts, Beliefs,
or Practices**

Group worship, usually in churches. No secret rites. Baptism and Lord’s Supper (Communion). Active voluntary missionary efforts. Aid to those in need: the poor, widows, orphans, and downtrodden. Christians believe that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah promised to Israel in the Old Testament (Tanakh). Jesus said his followers would be known by their love for one another.

Jehovah's Witnesses (Watchtower Bible & Tract Society)

Charles Taze Russell (1852–1916), later Joseph F. Rutherford (1869–1942). Began 1879 in Pennsylvania. Headquarters in Brooklyn, New York.



Charles Taze Russell

All current Watchtower publications, including the Bible (*New World Translation* only), *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines.

One-person God, called Jehovah. No Trinity. Jesus is the first thing Jehovah created.

Jesus is not God. Before he lived on earth, he was Michael, the archangel. Jehovah made the universe through him. On earth he was a man who lived a perfect life. After dying on a stake (not a cross), he was resurrected as a spirit; his body was destroyed. Jesus is not coming again; he “returned” invisibly in 1914 in spirit. Very soon, he and the angels will destroy all non-Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Impersonal “holy spirit” is not God, but rather an invisible, active force from Jehovah.

Be baptized as Jehovah’s Witnesses. Most followers must earn everlasting life on earth by “door-to-door work.” Salvation in heaven is limited to 144,000 “anointed ones.” This number is already reached.

The 144,000 live as spirits in heaven. The rest of the righteous, the “great crowd,” live on earth, and must obey God perfectly for 1,000 years or be annihilated.

Also known as the International Bible Students Association. Meet in “Kingdom Halls” instead of churches. Active members encouraged to distribute literature door-to-door. Once a year, Lord’s Evening Meal (communion); only “anointed ones” may partake. Do not observe holidays or birthdays. Forbidden to vote, salute the flag, work in the military, or accept blood transfusions.

Founder

Writings

God

Jesus

Holy Spirit

Salvation

Death

Beliefs/Other

Mormonism (Latter-day Saints)

Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805–1844) organized what is now the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) in 1830 near Rochester, New York. Headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, plus the Bible (King James Version only or Smith’s “Inspired Version”) which is seen as less reliable. Authoritative teachings of Mormon prophets and other LDS “general authorities.” *Ensign* and *Liahona* magazines.

God the Father was once a man, but “progressed” to godhood. He has a physical body, as does his wife (Heavenly Mother). No Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three separate gods. Worthy members may one day become “exalted” to godhood themselves.

Jesus is a separate god from the Father (Elohim). He was created as a spirit child by the Father and Mother in heaven, and is the “elder brother” of all men and spirit beings (including Lucifer). His body was created through sexual union between Elohim and Mary. Jesus was married. His death on the cross does not provide full atonement for all sin, but does provide everyone with resurrection.

The “holy spirit” is different from the “Holy Ghost.” The “holy spirit” is not God, but is an influence or electricity-like emanation from God (or “light of Christ”).

Resurrected by grace, but saved (exalted to godhood) by works, including faithfulness to church leaders, Mormon baptism, tithing, ordination, marriage, and secret temple rituals. No eternal life without Mormon membership.



Eventually nearly everyone goes to one of three separate heavenly “kingdoms,” with some achieving godhood. Apostates and murderers go to “outer darkness.”

Secret temple “endowment” rituals and “celestial marriage” available only to members in good standing. Baptism on behalf of the dead. “Word of Wisdom” prohibits tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine drinks. Two-year missionary commitment encouraged. Tithing essential. Door-to-door proselytizing. Extensive social network. People of African ancestry denied full access to Mormon priesthood and privileges until 1978.

New Age

Wicca

Based on Eastern mysticism, Hinduism, and paganism. Popularized in part by actress Shirley MaLaine (1934–) in the 1980s and 1990s. Beliefs vary.

No holy book. Use selected Bible passages; *I Ching*; Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist writings; and Native American beliefs. Writings on astrology, mysticism, and magic.

Everything and everyone is God. God is an impersonal force or principle, not a person. People have unlimited inner power and need to discover it.

Jesus is not the one true God. He is not a savior, but a spiritual model and guru, and is now an “ascended master.” He was a New Ager who tapped into divine power in the same way that anyone can. Many believe he went east to India or Tibet and learned mystical truths. He did not rise physically from the dead, but “rose” into a higher spiritual realm.

Sometimes considered a psychic force. Man is divine and can experience psychic phenomena such as contacting unearthly beings.

Need to offset bad karma with good karma. Can tap into supernatural power through meditation, self-awareness, and “spirit guides.” Followers use terms such as “reborn” to describe this new self-awareness.

Human reincarnations occur until a person reaches oneness with God. No eternal life as a resurrected person. No literal heaven or hell.

Can include yoga, meditation, visualization, astrology, channeling, hypnosis, trances, and tarot card readings. Use of crystals to get in harmony with God (Energy), for psychic healing, for contact with spirits, and for developing higher consciousness or other psychic powers. Strive for world unity and peace. Emphasis on holistic health.



Founder

Writings

God

Jesus

Holy Spirit

Salvation

Death

Beliefs/Other

No one person. Roots in 19th-century Britain. Partly inspired by Margaret Murray (1862–1963) and organized by Gerald Gardner (1884–1964) in the 1930s to 1950s.

No holy books; however, many groups use *The Book of Shadows*, first compiled by Gardner and later expanded by him and other leaders. Other popular works include *A Witches' Bible* and *The Spiral Dance*.

The supreme being is called the Goddess, sometimes the Goddess and God, or goddess and horned god (“Lord and Lady”). The Goddess can be a symbol, the impersonal force in everything, or a personal being. Wiccans can be pantheists, polytheists, or both.

Jesus is either rejected altogether or sometimes considered a spiritual teacher who taught love and compassion.

The Holy Spirit is not part of this belief. However, some Wiccans may refer to “Spirit” as a kind of divine energy.

Wiccans do not believe that humanity is sinful or needs saving. It is important for Wiccans to honor and work for the preservation of nature (which they equate with the Goddess).



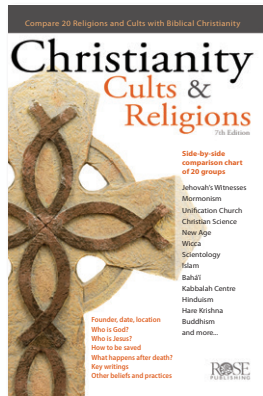
The body replenishes the earth, which is the Goddess's wish. Some Wiccans are agnostic about life after death, others believe in reincarnation. Some believe in a wonderful place called Summerland.

Wiccans practice divination and spell-casting, with most rituals performed in a circle. Many Wiccans are part of a coven (local assembly), though many others are “solitary.” Covens meet for ritual and seasonal holidays, including the eight major holidays (such as Vernal Equinox, Summer Solstice, and Beltane). Wicca is an occultic “nature religion,” not Satanism.

Islam

Comparing Sunni and Shi'a Islam

Founder	<p>Founded in Mecca, Arabia by Muhammad (AD 570–632), considered the greatest man who ever lived and the last of more than 124,000 messengers sent by Allah (God). Main types: Sunni (“people of the tradition”), Shi’a (“party of Ali”), Sufi (mystics).</p>	<p>Adherents Sunni: Over 1 billion worldwide Shi’a: Estimated 170 million, primarily in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, Bahrain</p> 
Writings	<p>The Holy Qur’an (Koran), revealed to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Essential commentaries are found in the <i>Sunnah</i> (“tradition”), composed of <i>Hadith</i> (“narrative”) and <i>Sirah</i> (“journey”). The Qur’an affirms the biblical Torah, Psalms, and Gospels, but Jews and Christians have corrupted the original texts.</p>	<p>Succession Sunni: Muhammad’s successors (called <i>caliphs</i>) should ideally be chosen by consensus/election. The first was Abu Bakr (c. AD 573–634), and over the centuries many others followed. No new caliphs since 1924. Shi’a: Muhammad’s successors (called <i>imams</i>) should be from his family and descendants (<i>Ahl al-Bayt</i>). The first of these was his cousin and son-in-law, Ali (c. AD 600–661), and thereafter all imams were bloodline descendants from Fatimah (Muhammad’s daughter and Ali’s wife). No new imams since AD 869.</p>
God	<p>Allah is One and absolutely unique. He cannot be known. The greatest sin in Islam is <i>shirk</i>, or associating anything with Allah. Human qualities like fatherhood cannot be attributed to Allah. Many Muslims think that Christians believe in three gods and are therefore guilty of <i>shirk</i>.</p>	<p>Authoritative Writings Sunni: The Qur’an, plus an emphasis on Hadith and other sayings attributed to companions of Muhammad such as Abu Bakr, Umar, and Aisha. Shi’a: The Qur’an, plus an emphasis on Hadith and other sayings attributed to members of Muhammad’s family and their supporters.</p>
Jesus	<p>Jesus (<i>Isa</i> in Arabic) was not God or the Son of God. His virgin birth is likened to Adam’s creation. He was sinless, a worker of miracles, and one of the most respected prophets sent by Allah. He was not crucified or resurrected. He, not Muhammad, will return to play a special role before the future judgment day, perhaps turning Christians to Islam.</p>	<p>Main Teachings and Practices Sunni: Five Pillars (or duties): Profession of Faith (<i>shahadah</i>); Prayers (<i>salat</i>); Almsgiving (<i>zakat</i>); Fasting during Ramadan (<i>sawm</i>); Pilgrimage to Mecca (<i>hajj</i>). Six Beliefs: in Allah; in Prophets and Messengers; in Angels; in Holy Books; in the Day of Judgment and the Resurrection; in the Decree (destiny/fate) Shi’a: Ten Central Practices: Profession of Faith (<i>shahadah</i>); Prayers (<i>salat</i>); Almsgiving (<i>zakat</i>); One-Fifth Tax (<i>khums</i>); Fasting during Ramadan (<i>sawm</i>); Pilgrimage to Mecca (<i>hajj</i>); Religious War (<i>jihad</i>); Enjoining to Do Good (<i>amr-bil-ma’ruf</i>); Exhortation to Desist from Evil (<i>nahi-anil-munkar</i>); Loving the Ahl al-Bayt and their followers (<i>tawalla</i>); Disassociation from the Enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt (<i>tabarra</i>) Five Principles: Oneness (<i>tawhid</i>); Justice (<i>adl</i>); Prophethood (<i>nubuwwah</i>); Leadership (<i>imamah</i>); Day of Resurrection (<i>yawm al qiyamah</i>)</p>
Holy Spirit	<p>“Holy spirit” can refer to Allah, to the angel Gabriel, or to a spirit used by Allah to give life to man and inspire the prophets.</p> 	<p>Major Divisions Sunni: Four “schools of law” (<i>Madh’hab</i>)—Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, Shafi’i Shi’a: Three branches—majority “Twelvers” (<i>Jafari</i>), who believe in a succession of twelve infallible, divinely ordained imams; “Seveners” (<i>Ismaili</i>); and “Fivers” (<i>Zaidi</i>)</p>
Salvation	<p>Humans are basically good, but fallible and need guidance. The balance between good and bad deeds determines one’s destiny in paradise or hell. Allah may tip the balances toward heaven. One should always live with the fear of Allah and judgment day.</p>	<p>Eschatology Sunni: Majority believe that a figure known as the <i>Mahdi</i> (“guided one”), from Muhammad’s family, will appear with Jesus before the final judgment. Shi’a: Majority believe in a series of twelve imams serving as Muhammad’s spiritual and political successors. The final one, Muhammad al-Mahdi (b. AD 869), is alive but hidden (in “occultation”) since AD 874; at the proper time he will appear with Jesus.</p>
Death	<p>Belief in bodily resurrection. One may pray for and seek favor for the dead before judgment day. Paradise includes a garden populated with <i>houris</i>, maidens designed by Allah to provide sexual pleasure to righteous men.</p>	
Beliefs/Other	<p>Muslims meet in mosques for prayers, sermons, counsel. Emphasis on hospitality, developing a sense of community, and maintaining honor (or avoiding shame). <i>Shari’a</i> (Islamic law) governs all aspects of life in places where it is enforced. <i>Jihad</i> (“fight”) may be used to refer either to one’s inner struggle to obey God or to literal warfare. Muslims who convert to Christianity or other religions face persecution and possible death.</p>	



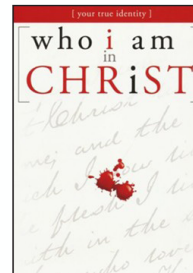
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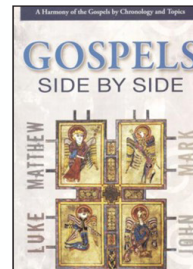
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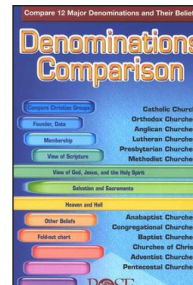
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